

An Interview with

Cleatus Barnett

25 January 2001

Washington, D.C.

Zachary Schrag, Interviewer

Transcribed by Doug Wilson, with minor edits by Mr. Schrag

Schrag: Zachary Schrag is interviewing Mr. Cleatus Barnett.

It is January 25th, 2001, a little past eight a.m.

We are at WMATA headquarters in Washington, DC. I'd like to start a bit with your background. I know you grew up in Kentucky. How did you end up in Montgomery County, Maryland?

Barnett: I was working in a radio station in West Point, Georgia. My future wife was working in an adjoining town in a hospital. Eventually we were to be married. Her home is in Washington, DC. We came up here for the wedding, intending to head back south and never made it. I was offered a job in Washington, accepted it, and worked there forty-one years and retired. During that forty-one years with Channel 9, WUSA-TV now, I also had a dual career in public service in two appointed positions and one elected office.

Schrag: What year was it that you came to Washington?

Barnett: 1951.

Schrag: Where did you live in the county?

Barnett: We were first located on Dalewood Drive, which is a subdivision known as Connecticut Avenue Estates.

We lived there about eight years and then moved to the Colesville area of Montgomery County and lived there since that time.

Schrag: And you were commuting into the District for work?

Where was the station located?

Barnett: On upper Wisconsin Avenue in the District.

Schrag: So still where it is now.

Barnett: Well, it's moved down the street about a mile, mile and a half, from where I started up there but essentially the same location.

Schrag: When you first came to Montgomery County, what was the county like? Was it rapidly growing after the war?

Barnett: Yes. It was still very rural. It had a rural ambiance around it, but subdivisions were springing up all over the county. Two-lane roads were becoming four-lane and six-lane roads. For example, Georgia Avenue in 1951, which is one of the principal streets in the country running from Silver Spring out toward Olney, [was] a two-lane road in those days, a six-lane road now and it's been six lanes for many, many years.

Schrag: How did you first get involved in public affairs?

Barnett: I had an interest in that sort of thing. I made overtures to the Republican Party to find something I could do. I started out at the very bottom, I guess you might say, door-to-door canvassing for the party and gradually worked up in the party hierarchy. The Republicans succeeded in winning the government in the early 60s, and I was appointed to an administrative job, the county personnel board, which is similar to the federal Civil Service Commission. Two years later a vacancy occurred on the county council due to a resignation -- that's an elected office -- and I was appointed to fill the vacancy. Two years later from that date I stood for re-election and was elected to a four-year term. At the end of the four years, I filed for another term. It was at that point, as my friend Carlton Sickles puts it, I was retired with the consent of the voters.

The county executive of Montgomery County -- during my tenure on the county council, we altered the form of government from a home rule county with a county council exercising both executive and legislative power to transferring the executive power of the

county to a new branch of the government that we created. The newly-elected county executive -- at that point I had just lost my election, and he had just won his -- appointed me as the county's representative to this agency. That relationship endured for perhaps twenty years. At that point another change in relationships occurred where the county's participation, both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, were altered. Whereas they formerly had paid Maryland's share of the construction and operating cost of this agency, it was transferred to the state. When it was transferred to the state, I was transferred along with it. The appointing authority then became the governor of the state. I've been appointed to two or maybe three -- I don't know -- consecutive terms with the governor making the appointments.

Schrag: Just to pin down some of the dates on that, when were you first appointed to the county council?

Barnett: About 1964.

Schrag: Then re-elected in '66 and then defeated in 1970.

Barnett: Right.

Schrag: Who was the county executive at the time who then appointed you to the WMATA board? Was that Gleason?

Barnett: Gleason, Jim Gleason.

Schrag: When you first joined the county council, to what extent were Montgomery County politics concerned with physical planning and transportation planning? Was that a major issue in the county at the time?

Barnett: Absolutely. The county council also had planning powers. In fact, the council was everything in those days. It was the board of health. It was the regional district council, which is another name for the hat it wears when it's doing its zoning work. The council selected the alignments that were to be built in Maryland. Metro had launched an initiative of proposing alignments that could be considered by the local jurisdictions and asked the local jurisdictions as far as possible to make choices. That was not an unlimited right obviously. Finances had to be worked out, and there had to be connectivity among the jurisdictions. There were a lot of impediments. But as far as possible it was the intent of this agency to put the lines where the local jurisdictions wanted them.

There were three lines proposed for consideration in Montgomery County. They were labeled A, B, and C.

The A alignment is the one that exists now, which is the Red Line. It begins in Shady Grove and makes a long loop through the downtown area of the District and back up to the other side of the county to Glenmont. That was known as the A line option.

The B line brought what is now the current Red Line out to the Medical Center station in Montgomery County and terminated it there. The other leg of the B line, after it made its loop from Medical Center downtown in the current alignment of the Red Line and back up to the other side of Montgomery County, when it got to Forest Glen station, instead of continuing straight on out to Glenmont as it does now, it cut across Montgomery County following the B&O Railroad tracks through Kensington, if you're familiar with the geography out there. [It] picked up the now existing Red Line somewhere around White Flint and went on to Shady Grove. It had the effect of really concentrating the Metro coverage of the county in that quadrant of the county.

The C line is what is now referred to as a Georgetown branch. It was running from Silver

Spring across to Bethesda. That one was eliminated almost immediately as a non-starter.

The other two lines, the A and the B line, generated intense political debate, extremely tense. I was in the camp that favored the current alignment of the Red Line. I thought it was the only thing that adequately served the county because it had lines that covered both halves of Montgomery County if you viewed Georgia Avenue as sort of being the dividing point. The line that went across -- and by the way, I may have these As and Bs reversed when I describe them.

Schrag: I'm pretty sure that's right. The B line was the B&O alignment.

Barnett: Anyway, I lost my point. But in choosing to support what became the approved Red Line and the present alignment in Montgomery County, I believed it was the only configuration of the lines that would serve the entire county. By going to Glenmont, we penetrated intense concentrations of population on the eastern side of the county. If it wasn't already there, we were able to see it coming. Olney, for example, was largely undeveloped in those

days, but it was clear that Olney was slated for a great deal of development.

Schrag: What made it clear?

Barnett: Just observing how it was rolling in a tide in that direction, and it was too nice a location to go unnoticed out there. So this thing was debated and hearings were held over a period of several months. There eventually came the time to make a decision. Metro said, "We need your judgment on what you want to do about this." We spent, I guess, close to a half-day debating this issue. It was very strong feelings on both sides of it, and each side thought that it was on the right side. I believe to this day that the correct judgment was made.

The county council had six members. It had one vacancy due to a death. There were three committed votes to the present alignment of the Red Line. Bill Greenhall, who was a professor over at Georgetown University and a member of the county council, was supporting the current configuration. Rose Kramer, a member of the county council, earlier a member of the board of education and a civic activist in the county, supported what is now the

Red Line alignment. I made the third vote. There was one vote that was not committed to either, Avis Birely from the Olney area. We didn't know for sure what she was going to do until the day we took it up, but we were able to persuade her to support the present configuration, and that made a majority of four and settled the issue. The other two votes were Max Keaney and Idamae Garrott. Max Keaney abstained from voting. Mrs. Garrott voted no. So it was a four-one-one vote. I think Max Keaney, after the voting was over, asked to change his vote to affirmative to create unity. Mrs. Garrott declined to do that. She felt so strongly about the other alignment that she just wouldn't do it, but she said she did want the record to be clear that she supported Metro. That's how that happened.

Schrag: To back up a couple of steps. You said that there was intense political debate and strong feelings. One of the things I'm curious about is why that happened in Montgomery County and less so in other jurisdictions. That is, I've been through the Fairfax board of supervisors' minutes for 1966 and '67, and they seem to have barely paid attention to the issue. Was there something about the Montgomery

County political culture that made people care so much?

Barnett: Well, I'm going to venture into an area in trying to answer that question of giving you opinion and not fact.

Schrag: Enough opinions and I get a consensus.

Barnett: Montgomery County had just gone through considerable turmoil over land use in the county. In fact, it was the issue in the election in '64, I guess it was, the election held in November '63. It resulted in the outs being voted in. The Republicans turned the Democrats out of office, I think largely on land use issue. This was still perking after the election was over. The voters decided they weren't terribly excited about the way the Republicans were doing things either, and they were in trouble with the voters.

But there was a fairly large group -- I don't know what adjective I'd use to describe them -- a large bloc of folks who were quite interested in the land use. They were strongly opposed to the Glenmont leg. They felt that it was going to spur premature development of -- there was nothing much north of

Glenmont at that time. They saw that whole blank slate being filled out with development, and they were not for it. They did not want Metro building a station in Glenmont to stimulate that sort of activity. Mrs. Garrott, a stalwart in the League of Women Voters and a longtime activist in land use issues, was a leader in trying to stop the line from going to Glenmont. I've just described the alignment of the votes on that, and she obviously didn't succeed. But I think the turmoil was rooted in land use and development of the county, the turmoil over the location of the Metro lines. The county firmly believed, and I think proved correct, that Metro would be a serious catalyst in this issue.

Schrag: If I remember this right, the Republicans who came in in '63 and '64, did they actually withdraw Montgomery County from the Council of Governments?

Barnett: They did.

Schrag: They did. So this was a sort of fairly -- I'm not sure how to describe it -- but a fairly conservative, pro-growth, pro-business cohort and

less interested in some of the regional planning ideology, particularly the Year 2000 --

Barnett: They were interested -- again, a lot of this is opinion, my observations on it.

Schrag: Your opinion is as good as anyone's after forty years in this area.

Barnett: The Republican council's interest lay largely in zoning and land use, and they went to work with great vigor on that. They made enormous changes in the zoning map of the county. They didn't have much interest in the Council of Governments. I thought they were wrong in that. When I was appointed to the council they were not a member of the Council of Governments. I let it be known that I favored the county belonging to the Council of Governments. I don't know how much that influenced ultimate rejoining of it. I'm hazy on that. But we did vote to rejoin the Council of Governments.

Schrag: I'm trying to map out the politics of the county at the time. The Republican rezoning -- I take it that was pretty much a pro-growth effort.

Barnett: Pro-growth and heavier densities.

Schrag: Whereas Garrott represented a more, shall we say, preservationist ideology of keeping open space. If I understand it, that kind of belief would have been very much in favor of the sort of regional planning represented by the 1961 Policies Plan for the Year 2000 and the wedges and corridors plan that came out of the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Barnett: The council did endorse the wedges and corridors plan.

Schrag: The county council.

Barnett: It didn't always adhere to it, but they formally embraced it. They caused an extensive review of it.

Schrag: That's sort of almost the difference. That is, in Virginia you don't have that plan at all. Prince George's County I'm sure endorsed it officially, but it seems that Montgomery was much more vigorous in its --

Barnett: Montgomery has done more than any jurisdiction, I think, in the region of carrying out the wedges and corridors plan. In fact, I think it pretty much prevails to this day.

Schrag: Montgomery and to a lesser extent Arlington are the two counties that really seemed to have embraced that, particularly where Metro is concerned. That is, I know that at this time Arlington is saying, "We really want to do a corridor on Wilson Boulevard," and that's what they did. Whereas Prince George's and Fairfax may have signed off on it, but you can't see it today because they have not really shaped their land use. I'm trying to understand what is it that makes one county so different from another as we go across the map.

Barnett: I don't think I have any insight into that.

Schrag: But with the Montgomery story though, you seem to have been a moderate on this issue in some ways, less demanding to --

Barnett: It bought me another four years in office. [Laughter]. And that was not my goal. I didn't believe in what the majority of the county council was doing, and I was fairly vocal in it. I was running for re-election. I was appointed to my first two terms -- excuse me, my first two-year term. I came in in the middle of a term that became vacant. I just assumed that the council and I were

cut from the same cloth, so to speak. I think the council assumed that.

Schrag: The Republican majority.

Barnett: Yes. It never was really talked about. They didn't really discuss much anything with me when they appointed me. It wasn't long that I concluded that we were on the wrong path with this zoning, and the newspaper folks were on our case. The Evening Star, which was still in existence at that time, particularly was aggressive. The dominant county newspaper at that time -- it's not anymore -- Montgomery County Sentinel was crusading on the zoning issue. The pot was really being stirred. I eventually became to be identified as being a separate entity from the council on this issue. Anyway, when the dust settled, all the members of the council, with a seven-member council at that time, had run for some office or another, and I was the only one of that body that was elected to anything that year. It was, in my opinion, largely because of the zoning issue. I became perceived as being on the right side of that issue.

Schrag: This was for the '66 election.

Barnett: Yes.

Schrag: Was there any particular moment when you decided to break with the Republican majority and call for more restraint in the rezonings?

Barnett: No. I think it evolved into that, but it evolved fairly rapidly.

Schrag: It seems almost as if the very extremism of that pro-growth Republican majority caused enough of a backlash in Montgomery County to sort of twist, really cement that commitment to planning and restraint.

Barnett: It was the council that succeeded what at that time was referred to as the Diggs council. I don't know how much of Montgomery County history you know. Are you familiar with --

Schrag: Some of it. I've been reading through a lot of clippings files.

Barnett: Catherine was a strong leader of the council. I think she held the belief that she was really doing good things for the county to generate all this activity. She did earn the right to bear the name of the council, generally referred to as the Diggs council. Anyway, that council did not make the

decision on the Metro alignment. That occurred after the election and a new body had been elected.

Schrag: So this is very important. So you've got the Diggs council up to '66. Then the election of '66 there is a sort of reaction against that that puts in a more moderate council. It's that new moderate council that then gets handed the decision on the Metro alignment.

Barnett: Right.

Schrag: So it's still a very big issue as a result of the previous council term, but it's a new set of players. So the debate is not really between the massive growth proposed by the Diggs council and the restraint proposed by Garrott, it's between a sort of more moderate A routing and a somewhat more restrained B route.

Barnett: Yes. The 1966 council -- it was elected in '66; I guess it was '67 when they -- well, they did take office in '66 because they got a court order to install the council early. After the election of those local offices it's usually about a month before the transition is made. The citizens groups petitioned the circuit court to seat the newly-

elected county council the moment that the state certified their election. A three-judge panel on the circuit court granted the petition. We were seated almost immediately after the election, not more than just a very few days that passed until we assumed office. But basically the office began, under normal circumstances, after the new year, first week or so of the new year. Strangely, it wasn't a fixed date. It was sort of a gentlemanly negotiation between the outgoing officers and the incoming ones. I never participated in one of those, so I don't know how they did it, but they would agree on a date for the transfer of power. Strange.

Schrag: So this was an unusual election in 1966, very polarized, so polarized that as soon as one side wins they want the old council out immediately.

Barnett: That's right.

Schrag: Okay. This is very helpful. This is something I had not put together, the '66 election and the '67 alignments really growing out of the politics of that.

Barnett: The people who wanted to pretty much slow down land development as much as possible and stop increasing densities did not succeed in killing the line to Glenmont, which was one of their big goals.

Schrag: But it explains why the debate was so passionate anyway, whereas in other counties it just sort of almost was left to the technical staff, as far as I can tell. The other question I have about that --

Barnett: That was one of the -- how would I describe this? -- most important things I've ever done in public life. I claim a fair amount of the credit for that happening. I didn't do it alone; there were others who felt as strongly as I did about it. It is absolutely the most important thing that I have ever dealt with since I have been in public office.

Schrag: What did you think was at stake? If it had gone the other way, along the B&O line, do you think you would have had the same number of people on the eastern part of the county but just less train service, or would Garrott's vision of leaving that as more open space have succeeded?

Barnett: It wouldn't have worked out the way she thought it would. That huge area, which was almost totally

undeveloped in those days, was too close in not to be developed. When you see people now going to Frederick and far distant places to find open space to build on, common sense would tell you that Olney was not going to be able to resist it. The most you can do is just to control it and direct it like you wanted to go.

Schrag: So Garrott's heart might have been in the right place, but the open space wedge just can't be that close. It has to start a little farther out.

Barnett: It's been a long time since I've worked with this stuff. In fact, it's been thirty or thirty-five years. I don't think that the Olney development was a fatal blow to the wedges and corridors plan. I acknowledged earlier that while Montgomery County has been in the forefront in supporting wedges and corridors, and still is, it did immolate it at times. Olney might have been pushing in a little bit, but it wasn't fatal to it.

Schrag: One of the arguments used by the people in favor of that B&O alignment was that it would be cheaper than the alignment as built. Indeed, the Glenmont route is unusual in that it's, I think, the longest

stretch of underground construction outside of the beltway. Looking at the broad suburban map, almost all of Virginia's alignment is above ground, and certainly everything outside the beltway is above ground. I believe that the vast majority of the Prince George's County alignment is above ground. Montgomery gets this stretch of what proved to be, of course, very expensive construction. But even without knowing the geology, it seems unusual that in the fairly -- well, not very far out suburbs -- but in the outer suburbs WMATA was willing to put in that underground line at a time they were trying to economize. Do you have any comments on how Montgomery County ended up with that sort of urban subway outside the beltway?

Barnett: The issue of cost came up. Those who didn't want us to go up Georgia Avenue to Glenmont certainly tried to get all the mileage they could get out of that argument. I wouldn't hear it. I think the others who supported that line viewed in the same manner. Cost was not an issue. It was not going to be an issue. We were building these lines for eternity. You're not going to pick them up and move them if you put them in the wrong place. They are

there forever. Don't tell me anything about the cost. If it costs more, it costs more, but that's what we're going to do.

The feds got into the cost issue. They took their turn at trying to knock out Glenmont. We went through the process known as alternatives analysis. I believe it was the Jimmy Carter administration, and Brock Adams, Secretary of Transportation. President Carter, whatever his other talents might be, had very little sympathy for these transportation issues. They were just foreign to him, and he gave them very slight support. He had his secretary order an alternatives analysis should be conducted. Among the alternatives, a no-build was to be one of them.

Those of us who were still not too far from the point where we had made the decision to go up to Glenmont up Georgia Avenue viewed the alternatives analysis as a wedge to kill the line. They had already offered the opinion, the White House and the Department of Transportation, that the Glenmont line was far too costly a construction. It was in solid rock every inch of the way, and it was really tough plowing to get through it. To have alternatives

analysis were one alternative is no-build opened the door up far more than we wanted to see it opened. There were a lot of folks who went to war over that issue. Jim Gleason was, I guess, one of the leaders in it. He was at that time county executive. He made it fairly clear to them where he was coming from. He said, "If the commitment that's been made isn't lived up to, Montgomery County is walking." He wanted to talk to the secretary about that, the Secretary of Transportation, and he asked me if I could do anything to get him a meeting with the secretary. Well, I didn't have any relationship with the secretary, but senior staff here had a working relationship with him.

Schrag: The Secretary of Transportation.

Barnett: Yes. I believe it was Brock Adams. They were helpful in arranging a meeting. The secretary offered him a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. He said, "I've got to be in Atlanta, Georgia on such and such a day to give a speech. If Gleason wants to see me there, I'll make time for him." So Jim got on a plane and flew down to Atlanta and met with Adams and told him his views. While I don't know what

turned the tide on this thing, but we got an exception for the Glenmont line. It was not going to be subjected to alternatives analysis, which contained a no-build option. You had to do something so I guess people could save face. They proposed and we agreed to an engineering analysis, which took all the alternatives off the table. We were just going to analyze the engineering problems and, I guess, codify them on a piece of paper. We didn't see any threat in that, a little delay perhaps. There was no threat to that, so we agreed to it. That went forward. And trains are running to Glenmont this morning.

Schrag: When you said earlier that you were building for eternity and therefore less concerned with costs, in some ways it's a very remarkable thing for a suburban county elected official to say. Certainly when I look at the other counties, they were more concerned with keeping costs down than in getting the trains where they wanted them to go. One question is, the capital contributions agreement, the forty-thirty-fifteen-fifteen formula, I think wasn't actually signed until later in 1967. So when you were weighing the A line versus the B line, did

you know who was going to actually absorb whatever extra cost was associated with Glenmont or how that would be split up?

Barnett: We knew the cost. I can't confirm when it was formally agreed to, but the cost that was assigned to Montgomery County was \$116 million for the local share. Rose Kramer and I jointly sponsored a bill creating a transit tax and in that budget year actually levied a three-cent tax, deposited it in the fund, even though we were not at that point getting bills for anything but just to get it started.

Schrag: What kind of tax was that?

Barnett: It's a transit district tax. The county uses that bill to this day.

Schrag: That's a property tax?

Barnett: It's a property tax, three cents on all the real estate in the county. We proposed that bill to the council and it was unanimously adopted. We were the first jurisdiction in the region to take that step. It has since been made moot by the entire responsibility for funding of Metro is now a state obligation. But the framework of that real estate

tax survives to this day. In the current budget they have an assignment of some few pennies on a real estate base for all of the non-state transit work.

Schrag: How did that go over with the taxpayers and the voters?

Barnett: I don't think there was ever any particular response to it one way or the other.

Schrag: It's just remarkable. Again, in Fairfax the idea of raising the property tax a couple pennies for transit would be, I think, completely foreign. They wouldn't know what --

Barnett: We didn't have to do it that year. We didn't have any bills to pay. The money hadn't started flowing yet. We're still in the planning phase. But we wanted to put our cards on the table: We're supporting this thing. Here's what we're doing to demonstrate it.

Schrag: I think this is something that gets overlooked a lot, is people say, "Well, why does Montgomery County have better Metro service than Fairfax County? Why does it serve all the population centers and the employment centers? Why is Bethesda

and Grosvenor and all these places surrounded by density and all this?" It comes back to that political awareness, that willingness to impose a tax, that willingness to debate the issues, that was just absent in other jurisdictions. That's why I'm asking these questions. Okay. So this alignment issue finally gets settled at Airlie House in July 1967. I assume you were there for the Airlie II conference?

Barnett: Yes.

Schrag: What actually work got done at Airlie? Was the Montgomery portion pretty much decided and it just had to be worked out with other jurisdictions? I'm trying to understand --

Barnett: These kinds of questions are tough for me to answer. There were lots of meetings and they tend to blend together over time. It's hard for me to put my finger on a single meeting, saying, "This is where it happened." But generally the way the process worked, the jurisdictions responded to requests from this agency as to where we thought the alignments ought to be in our jurisdiction. I said at the outset on this process there were a lot of

caveats on that, not the least would be connectivity. Your lines have got to connect with the other guy's lines or it won't make any sense. That was not a problem in Montgomery County. Any of the proposed alignments in Montgomery County would have connected with the District section of that big U that comes from downtown upper Montgomery County to downtown Washington and back out and up Georgia Avenue to Glenmont.

We sent in our recommendation, that the configuration we chose would be the one that would be adopted by this agency. All the other local governments were doing similar things. They assembled all this together and take it to a regional meeting of political leaders. There it becomes a little flimsy as to who authorizes what. You can assemble public officials from throughout the region in a central meeting, and I'm struggling for how you describe this. They don't have any official standing in that forum. They're there, but they're not there in any formal governmental structure. So a lot of this gets done by consent. The chosen configuration of the Metro system is reduced to maps and they're flashed up on the wall

and they're explained. It's laid out that each of the jurisdictions individually have bought into and signed off on their particular part of it. From that flows an unofficial consent. It's not an official body that makes decisions. It's just a group of these office holders have gathered here, but they have no official standing in that forum. The official action is taken by Metro back in its headquarters. At that time I think it was over on L'Enfant Plaza. But it was based on their knowledge that what they were doing was okay with everybody. That's sort of a flimsy structure, but it worked.

Schrag: So people may have come out of Airlie with a pretty good idea of what it might look like, and then later on the official vote was taken.

Barnett: By the board of directors of this agency.

Schrag: But at Airlie itself was there -- you said that the officials sort of gave their consent, but was there deliberation as well that you recall? For example -

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Barnett: Presentations would be better. By that point everybody as individual governments had sent in their recommendations, and it just happened that

they all came together and put together in a single map. It was pretty much okay with most folks. Certainly a clear consensus existed. You might find dissent if you looked for it hard enough but not enough to control the meeting.

Schrag: So that map, pretty much the map we know today, had been put together by the staff, and this was a chance for everyone to look at it and talk about it a bit.

Barnett: Yes.

Schrag: So you agree on a map. You agree on a financing plan. It's all signed off in March 1968. Then Congressman [William H.] Natcher shows up. Do you as a Kentuckyan have any explanation of Natcher's behavior? I'm trying to understand him. I'm not sure anyone has every fully understood why he was willing to go so far to force the city to build highways.

Barnett: I didn't know Natcher. All I know about him is what I read in the paper. I read an account just recently, and I don't know where it was that I saw it, that Natcher really didn't have an issue in the interstate highway plan for the District of Columbia

and in particular the Three Sisters bridge, which became a symbol for the whole thing. He viewed it as an affront to Congress that they were fighting a clear congressional mandate to do this. He simply was upholding the Congress when he shot everything down. It was not out of personal conviction that he wanted some particular program. That might have been an opinion piece. It could have been the writer's own viewpoint of what he was doing.

Anyway, he caused a lot of heartburn in this agency, two or three years of virtually no progress at all. It got caught up in inflation. You remember it was back in those days when the interest rates, even on bank CDs, were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen percent. It caused the costs to escalate sharply, and we lost some years when we could have gotten a lot better bids than we were getting. But that's part of the process. Congress was there. Congress has a role and they exercise it with what they think are their best judgment.

Schrag: One thing it seems that Natcher did do for WMATA was that he provided a common enemy that kept the board together pretty unified until Natcher's defeat on

the floor of the House in 1971. It's after that
that --

Barnett: That didn't happen until the president, who at
that time was [Richard M.] Nixon, made an issue of
it and took Natcher on and defeated Natcher.
Looking back on it, I'm a little surprised he had
the horse power to get that done, but he got it
done.

Schrag: Do you have any sense of why he was willing to
intervene?

Barnett: No, I don't.

Schrag: I want to skip ahead a little bit to 1974, which was
your year as chairman. A lot of things happened in
that year. How are you doing, by the way? Do you
need a break?

Barnett: No.

Schrag: Could you describe the job of a WMATA chairman,
particularly in the era of Jackson Graham? I know
that Graham was a very strong leader, that he had
all the details, that everyone admired him. How
much was there left for the chairman to do in the
1970s?

Barnett: You need to understand the role of the chairman, and there's not a consensus on that. It varies with individuals. The chairman of the Metro board is not a policy-making position. He truly is a -- what's the expression? -- first among equals. That's what the chairman is. It's a board of equals and he's first among them. The chairman cannot issue orders. He can control the work of the board to some extent with his influence on the agenda, and in seeing areas that need attention [and] bringing that before the board and calling for action on it. But beyond that, the chairman is largely a presiding officer of the board when it's convened in formal sessions.

Schrag: So when you became chairman, did you have any particular goals, any particular agenda?

Barnett: I did, but it wasn't limited to when I was chairman. When I was not chairman I had the same objectives. I was always in favor of breaking out in the construction program anywhere you could and to move the work as rapidly as possible. I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about. I was trying to think of something. There came a time when I thought we could expedite the construction of

the line out to Shady Grove. The stars weren't aligned yet for the work to begin on it, and I cooked up the -- or proposed the process of asking for a loan from the internally-generated fund. A word of explanation on that term. We handled enormous sums of money in this agency, and a lot of times it's lying dormant and is earning interest. That interest is referred to as internally-generated funds. I asked if we could borrow several million dollars of that if Montgomery County would guarantee the repayment of it if something went awry. The board said okay and talked to Rockville, and after some thought they said okay. With that we started the design process somewhat earlier than it normally would have happened. That's the type of thing that an individual on the board, with or without being chairman, can sometimes be helpful and cause things to happen. If I spent some time on it I probably could think of other examples. That's the only that pops in my mind right now.

Schrag: It seems that those years in the early 70s were full of a lot of strife. For example, in a lot of Montgomery County neighborhoods -- Forest Glen and Takoma Park and Glenmont and so forth -- you had for

the first time a lot of opposition to Metro's coming and also on Yuma Street in Washington, which also affected Montgomery County. Were you -- I guess it was Forest Glen actually that some of the neighborhood meetings asked for the station to be canceled entirely. Were you involved in that at all? Do you attend any of those public hearings?

Barnett: What was canceled?

Schrag: Forest Glen -- they had a lot of community meetings, church basements and so forth, with people demanding that the Forest Glen station be canceled because it would bring in a lot of traffic and cars. Jackson Graham had his phone number unlisted because he was getting so many hate calls. From the newspaper accounts, which is really what I have for this, it seems that around '73, '74 the neighborhoods really sort of turn on Metro. It gets down to such details as Takoma Park whether certain trees are going to be cut down for the alignment and so forth. Looking back on this, on the one hand you can say these were people who were only thinking about their own backyards [and] not on the grand regional scale. On the other hand, this is democracy in action. People

don't want their government to do something that will harm their neighborhood. A lot of these stations with the big parking lots indeed would be nuisances for the people who live right near them and were designed more to serve people driving in from farther out. So if you had any comments on how that got resolved or how I should look at those events.

Barnett: The real hero in the Forest Glen situation that you just described was Norman Christeller. He was an alternate member of this board, held the seat that Carlton Sickles now occupies. In addition to that, he was also president of the Montgomery County council. He was fully aware of the intensity of the feeling in the Forest Glen area about the Forest Glen station being there. He rejected their arguments. They wanted the station eliminated altogether. When you leave Silver Spring, the next station you would hit would be Wheaton. The county council would have been the one who would have made the judgment to recommend to Metro that they delete that station, and Metro, following its processes, probably would have deleted it. Norm Christeller acquainted the council of this issue, told them what

was at stake. He said the position that the Forest Glen activists were taking was not in the best interests of the county and that he and other members of the council have to consider the totality of the interests in making these decisions. And it was best for Montgomery County that Forest Glen be built. The council supported him on it, and it was built. So far as I know, it's no longer a problem in the Forest Glen area.

Schrag: Did any council member lose his or her seat over that?

Barnett: I don't know, but I don't think that they did.

Schrag: Did you personally feel that the people in these neighborhoods were being reasonable or unreasonable? Did you have any contact with them?

Barnett: Well, I attended all the public hearings. I didn't have a good deal of personal contact with them.

Schrag: What were the hearings like? Were they rational and deliberative or just a bunch of people shouting?

Barnett: Some of both, I guess. It wasn't my decision on Forest Glen. I certainly was in accord with what happened. But as a member of this board, and the

board itself probably lacked the authority to compel either course of action to be taken. It was the council's decision, and it was their judgment and a correct judgment, in my opinion, that Forest Glen should be built.

Schrag: It's important that -- WMATA was always willing to defer to the local jurisdictions. Obviously WMATA wanted a system --

Barnett: It does that to the maximum extent possible.

Schrag: It's important that I understand the process of planning, because obviously WMATA had the technical staff to say, "Here is how much it will cost. Here is how many parking spaces we think we need." But at the end of the day, it was the jurisdictions that really had to decide about alignments and stations.
Do we have some time?

Barnett: Yes. I'm okay.

Schrag: Another debate in the early 1970s was putting in the elevators for wheelchair access. I know that Graham was dead set against this and that it ultimately took a lawsuit to compel it. How did you feel about that tradeoff of knowing that the elevators might

only serve a fairly small number of people yet that it could also be seen as a civil right issue?

Barnett: Well, I believe there was a very strong justification for the elevators. Everybody should be able to use Metro. There have been some other decisions of that type that might not be as fully justified as those elevators would be. The elevators should be there.

Schrag: Around the same time, January 1973, WMATA takes over the buses. It seems to me that the real problem faced by the authority was that you couldn't run the buses from the fare box without drastically raising the fares, and so you settled on keeping the fares pretty much what they had been under the private operation and financing the deficits through other taxes. Once you make that decision, you sort of have to give up on the idea that the rail fares are going to keep pace with inflation and that the rail system is going to pay for itself. Is that correct that it was sort of the bus takeover that killed the idea that the rail system would pay all of its operating costs from the fare box?

Barnett: Say that again.

Schrag: In the 1968 plan, and the 1962 plan and so forth, all of these earlier plans, it was always said that building the tunnels and building the rails would be a capital investment to be paid for by the federal and local governments together and some bonds. Those bonds would be repaid from surplus revenue from people paying their fares, as well as all of the operating costs of the rail system would be paid for by people paying their fares. Nowadays, with the rail system we have seventy-five percent of the operating costs paid for from the fare box and the rest is made up through taxes. I'm trying to understand where that earlier model died, where WMATA gave up on the idea that it would charge enough in the fare box that it could pay for all the trains running and pay off those millions of dollars of bonds that had been sold. My current hypothesis is that it is when WMATA took over the buses that the whole model had to change, the financial model.

Barnett: I don't know whether I'm going to be able to be much help to you on this one or not. The fare system in Metrorail has elements that cause it to not be the most reasonable way of financing rail operations. The long lines, in the case of the

Shady Grove line of the Red Line -- it's about seventeen-plus miles from Shady Grove to Metro Center. If you charge by the mile a flat fare -- the first mile costs the same as the last mile -- you have there for a fairly hefty fare to pay if you're going from Shady Grove to Metro Center or even if you're going on around to, say, Union Station, which would add some more space to it. The District of Columbia believes that you have to have a flat fare, otherwise they would view themselves as subsidizing the outer suburbs. But if you run the fare too high on these long runs, there won't be anything to subsidize. Nobody will be riding the system.

We pay a subsidy now that's over and above the fare structure. Don't hold me to figures, but I think it's somewhere around two dollars and fifteen or twenty cents as the maximum fare that we would charge no matter how long your ride is. The remainder is paid through a contribution by the local jurisdiction and by Metro itself. That has been able to keep the fares on the long lines within reason. There are members of the board, which I count myself as one, who believe that the fares are

at the outer limits now and have been there for some time and that's there's no headroom to raise fares. No one is proposing a reduction in fares, but you would have a pretty intense debate in the board if you proposed raising them. At the moment I don't believe they could muster a majority of the vote to raise fares.

Money has to come from somewhere. All that's not covered by the riders through the fare box and some other fringe sources of revenue -- there are minor sources of revenue other than fares; advertising is one thing that comes to mind -- will be paid in the form of subsidy from the participating jurisdictions. I personally view that as appropriate and acceptable, and so far the policy-making bodies of the local jurisdictions have concurred in that view. It would be erosive of the mission of Metro to drive people away from fares that are too high. We've spent ten billion dollars to build the system and enormous sums of money to operate it from day to day. So it's appropriate for the states and the counties to pay the difference between a reasonable fare and what it costs to run the system.

We carried that a step further last year, I guess it was -- maybe it was the year before. In the last year or eighteen months we last took a look at the fares. We merged the revenue streams from both bus and rail, and it's one source of revenue for the two now. For administrative purposes they still break it down into seventy-six or seventy-seven percent of the costs of operating the rail is out of the fare box and in the low thirties for the bus system. But the composite number is somewhere in the mid-fifties, fifty cents. What that doesn't pay is covered by subsidy.

Schrag: It seems to me that the big crisis of 1974, your year as chairman, was the minority contracting dispute where the DC members, Nevius and Moore, refused to -- well, essentially vetoed several contracts because they believed WMATA was not doing enough to promote minority contracting.

Barnett: Yes. They virtually paralyzed the agency for -- I forgot the length of time. I guess about six weeks. We would meet each week, and all we would do is approve the minutes of the last meeting, and that was as far as we could go.

Schrag: At one point, October 1974, you called it a "hostage action that could bring this agency to its knees."

Barnett: Who said that?

Schrag: You did.

Barnett: I did?

Schrag: At least the Post said that you did, or maybe it was the Star.

Barnett: I guess that's what it was. I probably spoke the truth.

Schrag: Did you understand at the time why they felt so passionately about this issue? How did you try to resolve it?

Barnett: We resolved it by satisfying them.

Schrag: Okay. So you basically -- there was some sort of compromise. They were asking for, I think, a twenty-five percent set-aside, and what they got was a requirement that each contractor either provide that much or explain the reason why.

Barnett: I don't remember the numbers. I know that they settled for less than they ultimately got. After the program got up and running, they came knocking on the door again, maybe more than once. I don't

know. Gradually those numbers were increased through the years. I think they got up to around thirty-five percent, didn't they?

Schrag: It could be.

Barnett: I'm not sure about that.

Schrag: What I really am confused by is that it does seem so bitter with this period of impasse, and then it sort of disappears very quickly. It doesn't quite seem like it was a surrender to the DC board members.

Barnett: We did raise them high enough that they had trouble implementing the program. There was many, many requests for waivers on the ground that we just can't get anybody. Usually those were routinely granted.

Schrag: That's very helpful. So the resolution then is to set a very high target but to grant waivers where contractors could show that they were unable to meet [them].

Barnett: If it just couldn't be done, and the [unclear] demonstrated a good faith effort that they had tried their best, the board would grant waivers. There have been a lot of those waivers.

Schrag: About that time you get the net income analysis that shows that the system is going to cost a lot more than expected. You throw away the 3 billion dollar estimate and go up to a 4.5 billion dollar estimate. You found a budget committee on the board that seems significant in that it's really the board taking a more active role in supervising Metro's finances. Then you're corresponding with the Bureau of the Budget, Roy Ash, trying to explain why the system was getting so much more expensive and saying, in part, there were a lot of new missions. Do you have any particular comments on why Metro got so much more expensive so quickly? Obviously inflation is a lot of it, but even in real terms there are many different factors going on.

Barnett: I'm not an expert on that. My opinion on that might not be worth much to you. Part of it might be that it was not an adequate basis for early estimates, and they were realistically unreal.

Barnett: When you get more serious about your estimating, and based upon some years of experience in building, you know that it's been underestimated and they're

able to produce figures that are more accurate.

That's all personal opinion. I can't document that.

Schrag: What was the role of the budget committee? Why did you think that it was necessary for you to step in and -- as I understand it, and this is in part from listening to interviews done with Graham, prior to 1974 it was really the staff that was controlling the money, and the board was setting very broad policy. Then around 1974 the board formed several committee which hadn't existed before, including the budget committee, to provide more accurate oversight of what the staff was doing. Is that a fair interpretation?

Barnett: That might not have been as a momentous policy change as it would seem to you in studying the dry record. I think it sort of grew into a committee system. I'm trying to think back on that. The budget committee might have gotten established through inadvertence as much as anything else. I seem to recall that some issue arose at a board meeting about the relationship between the counties and Metro. Idamae Garrott was making a lot of noise on this. She suggested that a committee be

established to define the relationship. I wound up on that committee. At some point I recall concluding what better defined the relationship than where the money comes from, who puts it up, and how is authority to spend given. I think it grew out of that. I turned it toward the direction of budget rather than a structural relationship. I believe that that is the simple genesis of the budget committee. It was not that one day the board rose up and said, "We're revolting this morning. We're taking over the preparation and administration of the budgets."

Schrag: Do you have any other comments on Graham's definition of his job and also why he ultimately decided to retire when he did?

Barnett: Graham is an essential link in the chain that is Metro. It's problematic as to whether Metro would have made it as an agency with the commission that it has were it not for Graham. He was a strong and gifted leader who as a professional was on the top of his game. He knew the construction business. He allowed nothing to get in his way. He took this agency when it was nothing and brought it into being

and in a fairly short period of time. I don't know why he left. He never shared that with me. Others have said that he just believed it was time for him to go, that he had used up all of his chips.

Schrag: We've talked a little bit about the alternatives analysis of 1977 and 1978, which really gets started in the [Gerald R.] Ford administration and goes on. I guess the big question I have there is how is it that two or three years the entire system was studied and restudied with relatively little changes. I know that there were some alignment changes in Prince George's County.

Barnett: Very few.

Schrag: Do you have any general comments on why the 1968 map proved so durable?

Barnett: I think you'd have to conclude that it was meeting the needs of the people. They were satisfied with it. Very little was changed.

Schrag: It's an odd episode in that both Ford and Carter and their secretaries of transportation were very demanding that WMATA and the Council of Governments go through this process. They came in very hostile. Not only did no one really find anything terribly

wrong or propose any particularly appealing alternatives, but -- well, my question then is, the ratification of that is the Starke-Harris bill of 1979, which says the federal government is going to pay a couple billion dollars more to get the job done. To me this seems like a very important moment, whereas earlier the federal government said, "We'll only pay this much, and we want to be repaid and we'll repay the bonds from the fare box." With Starke-Harris there is a realization that the system will require capital subsidy and the federal government is going to take that responsibility. Do you have any comments on how that bill got passed and how Jimmy Carter was convinced to change his mind?

Barnett: I don't know how it got passed. Herb Harris was a new congressman. They don't usually have that kind of horse power. He was only there four years, wasn't he?

Schrag: That could be right. The Harris switch-off was --

Barnett: So that means within a couple of years after he arrived there he was getting a major piece of legislation through with his name on it. I wasn't

too involved in that effort. It was handled by staff. We provided them with professional lobbyists to assist them.

Schrag: The thing is, the way it's structured now, I have a lot of attention to the political history of Metro up to the signing of Starke-Harris in 1980. It seems to me that, while a lot has happened since 1980 -- conflicts with the [Ronald] Reagan administration about how the budget would be handled and the fast-track program and all the rest -- the last twenty years were significantly less dramatic than the previous period. That is, from 1960 to 1980 every year there is a debate over whether there should be a rapid transit system, where it should go, whether it will be cut back to fifty miles or sixty-eight miles. Since 1980, from my perspective, and it may be warped by what documents I've been able to get, the story is a little calmer. You've got that long perspective. Do you think that there have been major crises in the last twenty years?

Barnett: Nothing that calls into question the legitimacy of this agency.

Schrag: Whereas the alternatives analysis did in a way.

Barnett: Yes. Clearly. There was inherent in that the notion that you might find that the alternative to do nothing was the correct one. It put it all back on the table, all except Glenmont, which we got an exception on.

Schrag: Since then it's been more a question of when not so much whether.

Barnett: That's right.

Schrag: That is, the completion date was pushed back. In 1977 they were talking about finishing in 1984. Then a few years later they're talking about '93. And eventually we got it last week, two weeks ago. But the basic legitimacy, as you say, of the project was not questioned, at least not that I've come across.

Barnett: That's right. Nobody is challenging the existence of Metro any longer and hasn't for some time.

Schrag: That's very helpful. I know we're wrapping up on time. If you have any general comments -- what do you think the greatest flaws of the system are or of the process that came out? Were there any terrible mistakes that you think were made?

Barnett: No. I think the whole thing from the very beginning has gone remarkably well and has validated the early vision of this agency. It has unfolded pretty much as the early builders dreamed it.

Schrag: Were there any big surprises along the way, or was it just a question of staying true to that early vision?

Barnett: No threatening surprises. We've already talked about one of the more serious periods. That was back when Natcher had put everything on hold. It was a gloomy time. It wasn't clear where it was going to end. But that turned out to be of no lasting consequence.

Schrag: That's pretty much all the questions I have. Do you have anything to add at this point?

Barnett: No. I don't think so. I'm not sure how much help I've been to you.

Schrag: You've been extremely helpful.

Barnett: I'm getting to an age I don't remember much anymore. Will this be available to the public if you ever --

Schrag: If you sign that form. That's what the form is for, the release form. If you sign the release form -- that's the point of the release form is to make it available to the public unless you want it sealed. So it's really your decision.

Barnett: What form would it be in? In a book form?

Schrag: Right now it would just be an audio recording unless I get funding to have someone type it up, which I may do in the future. I have only limited grant funds for that purpose.

Barnett: I want to ask counsel about this. I'm sure they have no problem with it.

Schrag: Absolutely. I will stop the recording now.

Barnett: After I've signed it I'll send it to you.

Schrag: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview].

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